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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3416
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 9439
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 3423
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 1139
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 2903
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 3374
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//OSD/ISA/AP// IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 004303

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STATE FOR EAP AND EAP/MTS
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (LAWLESS/TOOLAN/BAILEY)
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMMONS)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2016
TAGS: [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: PRESSING FOR CONTINUED PROGRESS IN MILF PEACE TALKS

REF: A. MANILA 4221
[1](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 1812
[1](#)C. MANILA 3344
[1](#)D. MANILA 3321
[1](#)E. MANILA 2994
[1](#)F. MANILA 2833
[1](#)G. MANILA 2013

Classified By: (U) Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Ambassador, DCM, and Country Team are pressing government, military and diplomatic leaders on the importance of continued progress in the MILF peace process, despite the recent impasse over land rights. Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process Secretary "Jess" Dureza told the Ambassador on September 22 that he believed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leadership still recognized the benefits of peace and pursuing negotiations, but predicted there would be "no bold breakthrough" before the May 2007 elections. Dureza added that, with more active involvement by Brunei as well as a Japanese decision to participate in the International Monitoring Team, Malaysian facilitators appeared "agitated" about potentially losing their lead role in the peace process. He said that he saw no wavering, however, in senior-level Malaysian interest in bringing about a successful conclusion to the negotiations. Finally, Dureza observed that the United States has a high, positive profile in Muslim Mindanao, due in part to growing public recognition of the USG's extensive development projects, exchange programs, and humanitarian assistance.

[1](#)2. (C) Separately, Executive Secretary Ermita told us on September 27 that, while there were some tensions among the negotiators, the Philippine government had no doubt about Malaysia's commitment to facilitating the peace talks. "Malaysia doesn't want the talks to fail," he noted. Ermita said that he believed the MILF as a whole -- and Chairman Murad personally -- wants peace. As for potential rogue MILF commanders, Ermita said that the Armed Forces of the Philippines was now in a strong position to defend the peace in Central Mindanao.

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador pressed the importance of the peace process and sought views of British, Canadian, Australian,

New Zealand, and Japanese Ambassadors. All indicated a common perception that press reporting on the peace talks may be overly alarmist. The Japanese Ambassador noted that Japanese International Cooperation Agency President Sadako Ogata came away from her September 17-21 visit to Mindanao with the impression that the situation is not as dire as some have described it. All Ambassadors agreed to raise the importance of the peace process publicly and with key Philippine officials in the coming weeks.

¶4. (C) COMMENT. As the peace process confronts the difficult issue of land rights, brinkmanship by the MILF and concern from negotiators are not surprising. While we do not discount the possibilities of miscalculation, we believe the fundamental desire for peace among the Philippine government, the MILF, and Malaysia, as facilitator, remains sound. The environment in which to confront the difficult land rights issue gradually improves with growing international support and deepening U.S. development assistance in Muslim Mindanao. We will continue to press all sides in Manila and Mindanao to surmount the current hurdle in the critical weeks ahead.

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KENNEY